

# Preventing Substance Abuse

The use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs is one of the biggest problems facing young people today. Your pediatrician cares very much about your family, and wants to help if there are problems in any area -- especially if you have concerns about substance abuse.

There are no guarantees that your child will not choose to use drugs, but as a parent, you can influence that decision by:

- not using drugs yourself
- providing guidance and clear rules about not using drugs
- spending time with your child sharing the good and the bad times

All of these are necessary to help your child grow up free from the problems of drug use.

Much of what children learn about drugs comes from parents. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions about your feelings and behaviors about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

1. Do you usually offer alcoholic drinks to friends and family when they come to your home?
2. Do you frequently take medicine for minor aches and pains or if you are feeling sad or nervous?
3. Do you take sleeping pills to fall asleep?
4. Do you use alcohol or any other drug in a way that you would not want your child to?
5. Do you smoke cigarettes?
6. Are you proud about how much you can drink?
7. Do you make jokes about getting drunk or using drugs?
8. Do you go to parties that involve a lot of drinking?
9. Do you drink and drive or ride with drivers who have been drinking?
10. Has your child ever seen you drunk?
11. Do you let minors drink alcohol in your home?

As a parent you can do a lot to prevent your child from using drugs. Use the following tips to help guide your child's thoughts and behaviors about drugs:

1. **Talk with your child honestly.** Don't wait to have "the drug talk" with your child. Make discussions about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs part of your daily conversation. Know the facts about how drugs can harm your child. Clear up any wrong information, such as "everybody drinks" or "marijuana won't hurt you." Be clear about family rules for use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
2. **Really listen to your child.** Encourage your child to share questions and concerns about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Do not do all the talking or give long lectures.
3. **Help your child develop self-confidence.** Look for all the good things in your child -- and then tell your child how proud you are. If you need to correct your child, criticize the action, not your child. Praise your child's efforts as well as successes.
4. **Help your child develop strong values.** Talk about your family values. Teach your child how to make decisions based on these standards of right and wrong. Explain that these are the standards for *your* family, no matter what other families might decide.
5. **Be a good example.** Look at your answers to questions above. Your own habits and thoughts about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs make an impression on your child. Your actions speak louder than words.
6. **Help your child deal with peer pressure and acceptance.** Discuss the importance of being an individual and the meaning of real friendships. Help your child to understand that he does not have to do something wrong just to feel accepted. Remind your child that a real friend won't care if he does not use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
7. **Make family rules that help your child say "no."** Talk with your child about your expectation that he will say "no" to drugs. Spell out what will happen if he breaks these rules. (For example, "My parents said I can't use the car if I drink.") Be prepared to follow through, if necessary.
8. **Encourage healthy, creative activities.** Look for ways to get your child involved in athletics, hobbies, school clubs, and other activities that reduce boredom and excess free time. Encourage positive friendships and interests. Look for activities that you and your child can do together.
9. **Team up with other parents.** Work with other parents to build a drug-free environment for children. When parents join together against drug use, they are much more effective than when they act

alone. One way is to form a parent group with the parents of your child's friends. The best way to stop a child from using drugs is to stop his friends from using them too.

10. **Know what to do if your child has a drug problem.** Realize that no child is immune to drugs. Learn the signs of drug use. Take seriously any concerns you hear from friends, teachers, or other kids about your child's possible drug use. Trust your instincts. If you truly feel that something is wrong with your child, it probably is. If there's a problem, seek professional help.